2: Fortes E-5 (1934-1937) 1945
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The institution distinctive of the autochthonous communities is the office of 'Custodian of the Earth'. This ritual office, involving priestly functions in connexion with the cult of the Earth, is found among many West African peoples from the Senegal to the mouth of the Niger. In the Voltaic region it is the exclusive prerogative of the autochthonous communities.

The ethnographic picture of to-day suggests that the population of the Voltaic region was, in the past, constantly being redistributed by migrations of small groups. In the absence of written records that is all we can say. The fact that such migrations have gone on in the recent past, and are still going on in the central area, suggests that these migrations were (as they are) the result rather of ecological pressures and social forces than of large-scale conquests. But marauding slave-raiders may have been a cause of migrations in some areas. Two of the most notorious, Samory and Babatu, were spreading devastation in the north-western parts of the region at the time when the French and the British were partitioning the country during the last decade of the nineteenth century.

Physically, culturally, in their economic organization, and their social and political structure, the people of Taleland are typical in every respect of the tribes of the central Volta region.

General Characteristics of the Tallensi

The people of the central Volta region are of negroid stock. They are not a notably fine physical type, but the best of them are attractive physical specimens, as may be seen from the photographs in this book. Head measurements of thirteen Tale men gave an average C.I. of 74·7. The predominant head type appears to be dolichocephalic. In skin colour they vary from black through chocolate brown to bronze, which the natives call 'red' (*bon-ze'e*) and regard as the most attractive bodily hue. Their hair is of the usual negroid peppercorn type. They have also the typical negroid nasal and lip forms, but the very broad, flat nose and markedly everted lips are not so common as in the tropical forest belt. Both men and women are of medium stature, the men being slightly the taller. Anybody over 5 ft. 7 or 8 in. is considered tall. Though they are mostly slight in build, all the somatic types with which we are familiar may be seen among these people: the stocky pyknic, the slim asthenic, the stalwart athletic, to use Kretschmer's terminology, are all common. Fat men or women, however, are very rare. Climatic conditions, density of population, and a primitive agricultural technique[1] all conspire to keep the average standard of nutrition low. In the best seasons the natives grow only enough cereals for their needs.[2] Their animal husbandry provides little surplus to exchange for cereals, and they have no crafts worth speaking of. The labour they supply to richer parts of the Gold Coast contributes very little return by way of foodstuffs to the home community. Like most subsistence farmers in Africa, their diet is notably deficient in animal protein.

[1] *Vide* Lynn, C. W., op. cit.

[2] This aspect of Tale economics is more fully discussed in Lynn, op. cit., and in Fortes, M. and S. L., loc. cit.

2: Fortes E-5 (1934-1937) 1945
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146 No biological or medical research has hitherto been carried out among
164 the Tallensi or their nearest neighbours. Hence it is impossible to determine how far their physique, efficiency, and standard of health have been affected by their low scale of nutrition. To the lay observer they do not appear to be stunted or to show a high incidence of physical defects. They are fortunate in living outside the sleeping-sickness zone, but the
[657] common endemic diseases of the region are rife among them. The natives have no reliable remedies for these diseases, and the Government dispensary at Zuarungu, the only regular medical service provided for the district, cannot cope with more than a fraction of the sick. From the point of view of physical health the Tallensi of to-day are probably little better off than their fathers were.

291 Native habits of dress and personal hygiene are doubtful assets from
515 the point of view of health. Children go stark naked till adolescence, in the case of boys, and till their first pregnancy in the case of girls. Women go naked except for the perineal band. Men always wear a loin-cloth for the sake of modesty, but it is usually grimy with accumulated dirt. In addition, a man usually wears a goatskin or sheepskin, or a ragged remnant of an old tunic or cloth slung across his back, as his working garb; clothes are worn only on special occasions.

515 Whether or not these customs of dress are injurious, the indifference of the Tallensi to bodily cleanliness cannot be beneficial to their health. By European or Coast African standards, the Tallensi and their neighbours are dirty people. They wash only rarely, especially in the dry season. This is due, in part, to the scarcity of water and to the fact that soap is still an expensive luxury, but also in some measure to native ideas of cleanliness. Tallensi do not object to body dirt. Only young dandies and marriageable girls take pride in a 'clean skin' as a mark of beauty and wash regularly. It is not surprising, therefore, that the most superficial wounds usually fester.

364 The sanitary habits of the natives are equally primitive. A homestead is usually kept fairly clean indoors, but the live-stock yard is inside the homestead, and the accumulation of manure there, as well as the refuse midden just outside the entrance, are the breeding-places of swarms of
[514] flies. Then, also, the natives defecate just outside their homesteads. The stench around a Tale homestead in the rainy season is enough to shake
[241] the hardiest anthropologist. These noisome accompaniments of home-life do not trouble the natives, who look upon animal manure and human excrement as essential fertilizers for their farms.

181 In spite of these hardships and hazards Tallensi set a very high value
183 on their culture and way of life. In his workaday life the native gives an impression of being a steady, sober person with a good grip of himself. He can work hard if necessary, but he can enjoy idleness too. Wasteful and extravagant at times, especially on certain ceremonial occasions, he is normally frugal and abstemious. A keen sense of property and of the value of material goods goes with generosity to kinsfolk and friends. Though he is no stickler for the letter of custom, he attaches great importance to social rights and obligations. Respect for social and genealogical superiors is a strong point of Tale etiquette, but natives are rarely

4: Fortes and Fortes E-5 (1934-1936) 1936
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a good soup; but no soup is complete without seasonings (*zikuot*). Red pepper (*nanzunh*), the most important, is never omitted from any soup, is added to other dishes too, and even to native beer to give it more punch. Salt (*yaarem*), though very highly valued, is not as indispensable as red pepper. *Ziem* (the ash of valley grasses) or *bakaa* (the ash of early millet stalks) is sometimes substituted for salt or used in addition to it. A much-favoured seasoning is the dawa-dawa seed ball (*kpɔlug*) which is sometimes even used as the foundation of a soup. Usually the seasoning ingredients are all used together; the more pungent the soup the better it is liked. Most women do not keep large supplies of seasonings, but consider it worth while to walk several miles to the nearest market to buy them.

Thus, though the native considers soup merely as a relish for his porridge, it really provides the vegetable and animal food (the latter in very small quantities) which balances a purely cereal diet.

The soup is always put on to cook first. While it is boiling, the woman sweeps out the close (*dendɔŋo*) where the meal is to be eaten, and prepares the vessels for serving it. The preparation and cooking of the soup takes 30–40 minutes. When it is ready she makes the porridge. In all these tasks a woman is assisted by her young daughters. Small boys, too, sometimes give a hand with the fire, but never with the cooking.

As soon as the porridge is ready it is dished up in several calabashes. The housewife takes much trouble in arranging her husband's portion in neat slices—she is less fastidious about the other portions. Each portion of porridge is rubbed over with shea butter; that of the husband's very liberally. This is the most common way in which fat is consumed. After the porridge has been shared out the soup is poured into an equal number of dishes, or sometimes over the porridge. The actual cooking and serving of food, unlike the fetching of wood and water, does not absorb a great deal of the housewife's time. One hour is sufficient to prepare a meal for ten people.

The amount of food consumed per meal differs according to the seasons. When food is scarce, whatever quantity of grain a woman has she will cook, and it will have to suffice; but a Talena never feels satisfied unless he has had about 1½ lb. of porridge at a sitting.

There is no specially appointed eating-place in the compound.

7:Lynn G-5 (1932-1936) 1937 FE11 Tallensi FE11

is used in preparing tobacco for chewing, and also, by percolation, "coom missom" (Nankani), literally "sour water", which is used in cooking cereal foods. The salts in the ash probably supply important minerals to the diet (11), but the process by which they are obtained, robs the soil of much of the manurial value in the residue of the early millet crop.

The leaves of cowpeas are picked by women throughout the growing season and used in making soup. Maize is harvested towards the end of July, followed by "neri". The fruits of neri are buried in the ground for about ten days to rot the pericarp; they are then dug up, washed by women in a stream, and the seeds are dried and stored in pots for future use. Early guinea corn is reaped at the end of August and in September, by which time late millet and the main guinea corn crop are coming into flower. At this season, women and children strip all the leaves and sepals from Hibiscus sabdariffa and, after careful drying, store them in pots for making soup during the dry season. The leaves of Hibiscus cannabinus are similarly treated, and the end of the branches, bearing fruits, are cut off and later the seeds are removed for soup making. The bast fibres of both Hibiscus sabdariffa and Hibiscus cannabinus are drawn after retting in streams for 10 to 12 days: they are made into rope of good quality; this work is generally performed by men. Women also draw the fibres of Hibiscus cannabinus, and scrub them white for making the "tails" they sometimes wear as alternative dress to leaves.

The main harvest season starts during the middle of September with groundnuts, and is carried on through October, and into early November, with guinea corn and late millet. During this period, from a peak in August, the rainfall decreases and the water-table falls; with the onset of the harmattan in November, the whole countryside dries rapidly. The groundnut plants are lifted with a hoe, and carried to the shade of a tree, where the nuts are picked off; the hay is carefully conserved as a dry season fodder. The day previous to reaping the late cereal, cowpeas are collected and carried to the compound; the leaves and stems are also conserved for fodder. The heads of late millet and guinea corn are cut off in the same way as those of early millet, and the stems are trampled to the ground. For about three weeks after harvesting, livestock are given open range in the farms and they feed readily upon the still succulent leaves of guinea corn and, to a less extent, millet. But as soon as the material is dry enough, fire is put through the farm to burn off the trash from the resistant cereal stalks, leaving them slightly charred, and clean: in this way much valuable dry season fodder is destroyed. The stalks are chopped from their

7:Lynn G-5 (1932-1936) 1937 FE11 Tallensi FE11

5. A "vicious circle" has been created. Years of living on the margin of subsistence, have sapped the energy of the people and predisposed them to disease; at the present time, many are physically incapable of the hard work which is necessary to bring about an improvement in their conditions.

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Suggestions for the Improvement of Local Agriculture.

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From our study of the causes of food shortage it is possible to suggest ameliorative measures. The two main forms which these measures must take are:—

1. By increasing the area of land in cultivation.

2. By improving the existing system of farming.

But as we have seen above (Indirect Causes of Food Shortage) the effectiveness of the first measure depends upon the second. It is therefore upon measures for improving the existing farming system with which we are concerned at present. Some of the more important of these are considered, in tabular form, below. It should be mentioned that the improvement in water supplies, which is shortly to receive attention (14), will play an important part in the general improvement of conditions, towards which the following suggestions are made:—

1. *Growth of a greater diversity of crops.*

Too much reliance is placed upon cereals. The planting of more groundnuts and sweet potatoes; the introduction of pigeon peas, "sanzi" (an early maturing Dagomba bean), cassava, and, in some areas, yams and sesamum, would make useful additions to the present range of crops.

2. *The introduction of a rotation of crops.*

This would require study over a period of years, but if, as seems desirable, the area of legumes and roots is to be increased, some form of rotation will be essential.

3. *Attention to the increase and maintenance of soil fertility.*

Just as farmyard manure is the basis of arable farming in most other countries in the world, so might it usefully become the basis of arable farming here. "Mixed farming" provides the solution. The livestock of the country have a greater potential value as the producers of